

The Way It Was

NAME: Jim Gross
UNIT: 3rd Squad, 4th Cavalry, Sgt.
TIME PERIOD: January 31, 1968
SOURCE: Letter sent to the museum
concerning a 51 Caliber Chi-Com
Machine Gun in the collection
DATE RECEIVED: March 1996



On the morning of January 31, 1968, Bravo Troop 3 Squadron, 4th Cavalry was pulling perimeter duty north of a town called Trang Bang. Our job was to check for mines and ambushes. A call from Tropic Lightning came over the radio that Ton Son Nhut Air Force Base was under heavy attack. Our sister troop Charlie had already arrived on the scene and taken many casualties. We were ordered to proceed immediately and reinforce. Fortunately, the enemy didn't blow the bridges, ambush us or mine the roads. When we did arrive at approximately 0800 hours, fierce fighting was taking place. I noticed American bodies lined up and down the rice paddy dikes, with numerous enemy soldiers lying about. The battle lasted all that day, but we eventually beat them back by nightfall.

The next morning, American Intelligence reported that the 271st V.C. Regiment was held up at a place called Hoc Mon and was using the area for staging attacks. With Ton Son Nhut now secured, we proceeded there. Upon arrival, we quickly took sniper fire, but soon eliminated it. We then advanced to the first wood line, not knowing the enemy was very well entrenched beyond it. It would take us, the 27th Infantry and 15 Air Strikes to get them out of there.

A squad of the 27th was assigned to my two Personnel Carriers. On the third day their Sergeant was killed. Since I was the ranking NCO, I was put in charge of his men. On the fifth and final day of the battle, a plan was devised. A diversionary force would proceed as usual from the south, but this time the main unit would circle and attack from the north. This worked well, and caught them totally by surprise. They left their main line of defense and sought refuge in their bunkers and tunnels. As we got closer, my Personnel Carrier came upon an abandoned bunker with a large 51 caliber machine gun sitting on a tripod. It was in very good condition and could very well be used again, so we couldn't just leave it. I ordered two of my men and two Wolfhounds (27th) to retrieve it, which they did.

As we moved closer, hand to hand fighting pursued. I almost lost my own life when an enemy soldier put a 9 millimeter pistol on me. A gunner on a tank got him before he could pull the trigger. At this point, two Americans were dead in my Personnel Carrier and another on top with a sunken chest wound. I had to get to an open rice paddy so he could be taken to the 24th evacuation hospital at Cu Chi. A Medi-Vac chopper was waiting for me. The pilot informed me

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that he couldn't take the dead for lack of room, but would come back for them later. When I got back to the battle, it was getting dark, so we moved out and set up a perimeter. An officer and three soldiers approached my carrier, and confiscated the captured machine gun. I didn't like this since so much went into getting it. The next morning, we went back to the scene of the battle. No trace of the enemy could be found. They had pulled out during the night, thus ending the battle of Hoc Mon.

About a week later, we went into Cu Chi (base camp) for rest. I decided to visit a museum to see the assortment of captured enemy weapons on display. To my surprise, there sat the enemy machine gun. A great feeling of pride came over me since I was the one who gave the order to retrieve it. Upon leaving the museum that day, I felt we had at least accomplished something at Hoc Mon. Twenty-eight years later, a newly arrived soldier from Hawaii, told me a museum called Tropic Lighting was at Schofield Barracks with enemy weapons from the Vietnam War on display. It only stood to reason, since my machine gun was on display at Cu Chi, the 25th would take it with them to Hawaii after the war. After reviewing everything, TLM 639 is the 51 caliber machine gun that me, my men and the 27th Infantry captured that day, so long ago in a place called Hoc Mon bridge in Vietnam.